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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
APRIL 3, 2005
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: As I mentioned, as we begin our
2 time together, I mentioned that we are beginning a fifty day
3 spiritual adventure.

4 I love the title of it. "Seeing The Unseen Christ;
5 How His Presence Transforms Our Life" and I invite you to
6 pick up a journal at one of the welcome centers.

7 They are seven dollars. It's a way we can
8 strengthen our spiritual muscles.

9 One of our goals here at Bethany in 2005 is to grow
10 in our discipleship.

11 In other words, to not stay at the same place we
12 have been.

13 Easter is such a great image for us, when we have
14 the tomb before us and the darkness of that, and when those
15 early disciples went in and they were really prepared to
16 stay right there.

17 They were prepared to cry some more; to anoint the
18 body, the corpse, with ointments and spices. They were
19 prepared to cry more.

20 They were prepared. They knew what the darkness
21 was like. They new what death was like.

22 But they are just so surprised when they get there
23 that he's not there.

24 And that great picture of that's not where we are
25 supposed to be. We're not supposed to cling and hang on to

1 the familiar.

2 And the angels, they just try to convince those
3 early disciples, I just love that, that's what struck me
4 about the Easter story this year.

5 They go in, they get to the dark and the familiar,
6 and the angel is dazzling white and sitting there and says,
7 "You're looking for Jesus, aren't you?"

8 They already can see that's not Jesus, but they
9 still stay there.

10 So he then tries the next thing. He says, "He's
11 not here."

12 They still stay there, because the familiar is
13 better than the unfamiliar.

14 So he says, "Okay, if you have to stay here, all
15 right, come over here then and see the place where he laid."

16 Three things he says to them. They still stay
17 there.

18 Finally he says, "He's not here, he's out there."
19 And, "Go."

20 It takes four times, four little speeches for them
21 finally go out of that dark familiar, dank -- I love that
22 word dank-- are you with me on that one?

23 The stone smells a little musty, but it's still
24 familiar, but he says, "Go. He's out on the road."

25 And I love that image. Today is a great day to

1 think of the Easter road.

2 A little bit of green grass on the side. He's out
3 there ahead of us.

4 "Seeing The Unseen Christ; How His Presence
5 Transforms Our Lives".

6 One of the things I don't like about fifty day
7 adventures, and we have done them, I think maybe three, four
8 years ago we did one.

9 And it made quite a lot of difference in some of
10 your spiritual journeys.

11 You tightened up your spiritual muscles, some of
12 you.

13 One of the things I don't like about these, though,
14 is like when I skip a day, or I miss a day or two, I get on
15 myself.

16 I don't know about you. Don't worry about that.
17 Don't let that deter you from getting one of these today.

18 We are all bound to miss two or three days. Don't
19 even go back, okay?

20 Let's cut ourselves some slack and some love and
21 grace, okay? Don't go back; just pick up where you are.

22 And those of you who don't get a journal, maybe
23 you're visiting with us today and you haven't heard of
24 anything like that before, that's okay.

25 We invite you to enter in on the adventure as you

1 are able.

2 Today we are going to talk about how the presence
3 of Christ can move us to worship with genuine enthusiasm.

4 That's the theme for today as we begin our fifty
5 day spiritual adventure.

6 Those who truly practice the presence of Christ
7 will worship God with genuine enthusiasm.

8 A few weeks ago, I think it was a couple weeks
9 before Easter, maybe longer, a good friend of mine, a
10 teenager, said, "Pastor Wenda, I've got an extra ticket to
11 go to the Steven Curtis Chapman concert."

12 "Oh, yes, that's awesome."

13 I had never been to a Christian rock concert
14 before.

15 I didn't even know who Chris Tomlin was. I didn't
16 know he was the one that does that song on K-LOVE.
17 "Indescribable, Uncontainable", I didn't know that was the
18 guy.

19 I love that song, but I didn't realize that's who
20 it was.

21 But I did know that Casting Captain Crown does that
22 Voice of Truth that we had done here forty days leading up
23 to Easter.

24 So I was looking forward to hearing the original
25 artist sing that, and of course I like a lot of songs Steven

1 Curtis Chapman does.

2 Now, I know this may come as a surprise to many of
3 you, but being married to Pastor Mark I have been to a few
4 rock concerts.

5 (Laughter)

6 Do you know what I'm saying, okay? And some that I
7 would rather not have gone to.

8 What was the name of that one guy, Mark? The J.
9 Giles Band.

10 I thought what the heck is this? That was during
11 college.

12 But I have been to a few and I've kind of warmed up
13 to the idea.

14 I grew up a trained musician, classical musician,
15 so I enjoyed music, and the Beatles and stuff, but not like
16 Mark. Not like he is. He's fanatical about stuff.

17 Anyway, I was able to drag him one time quite a few
18 years ago to the Garth Brooks concert when they were at the
19 state fair here, and that was fun.

20 And then we recently went to Jackson Browne and
21 John Cougar Mellencamp.

22 Now at Mellencamp and at Brooks, this might come as
23 a surprise to you, but I danced and sang the whole time.

24 I know, it's out of character, I know, really out
25 of character.

1 So I didn't know what I was going to do at a
2 Christian rock concert.

3 I had been at large Lutheran gatherings, you know
4 what I am saying?

5 Some of you know what I mean. I had been to those,
6 like as a kid, at a Lutheran rally in Minneapolis one time I
7 remember when I was 17.

8 And I have been to like gatherings for pastors, and
9 I enjoy that because they really sing, even when they can't
10 sing very well, they like really sing, and I like that,
11 because I get caught up in that.

12 But I've never been to a large gathering of
13 Christians from all denominations, so I didn't really know
14 what to expect.

15 When I walked out of the MidAmerica Center I
16 realized I had just worshipped for like two hours and I was
17 exhausted.

18 I was tired. I was energized, but I was tired, and
19 I actually felt the same way I do after I'm done working
20 out.

21 I don't really want to go, but I always know that
22 once I'm done I feel so much better.

23 It's the same thing. I felt the same way.
24 Energized but spent.

25 You know sometimes like when you add maybe two more

1 pounds, for me it was a pound at a time, to a weight or
2 something and you can really feel the difference in your
3 muscles?

4 And I love that feeling. I just love that. It
5 hurts at the time, but I love that feeling. When you are
6 done you are energized, but exhausted.

7 Same for me when I practice my trumpet. I don't
8 really want to go and do it, it's just a bunch of boring
9 exercises, but I do it because if I don't do it this muscle
10 right here gets flabby and I can't play a note.

11 And I'm always glad when I'm done. It hurts, my
12 muscle hurts when I'm done practicing if I've done things
13 well and right, or I've actually even sweated a little bit,
14 but it feels good.

15 Now, did you know this word liturgy, some of you
16 old Lutherans, and no offense to you or anything, but it
17 means the work of the people.

18 And so you really ought to be wearing deodorant
19 when you come to worship, because it's supposed to be like
20 that.

21 You should be worn out when you are done
22 worshipping here.

23 It isn't a matter of checking it off and I think we
24 have missed that.

25 I think we have just grown accustomed to

1 worshipping the way that we do and forgetting that we are
2 actually supposed to sweat a little bit.

3 We are supposed to get worn out, kind of like a
4 Christian rock concert.

5 I know one of the reasons that I was able to get
6 courage up when I was in eighth grade to ask Brent to dance
7 at the eighth grade dance was because the lights were low.

8 You know how it is in gyms when you are in 7th and
9 8th grade, junior high.

10 There is a reason for that. When the lights are
11 low you have a little more courage.

12 And that's the same thing that happened at the
13 Christian rock concert, the lights were way down, if you
14 want to flail about you feel more free to do it.

15 I know the lights are really bright here today, and
16 we're working on it, I'm working on this, so that at times
17 the lights will be so low, we practiced a little bit during
18 the season leading up to Easter, practiced having the lights
19 low, because I noticed that you guys respond more.

20 It's like that eighth grade dance thing. You're
21 willing to step out of your comfort zone if I lower the
22 lights a little bit in worship at times.

23 So I realize that and I want to say it up front,
24 because we are not always going to have someone at the light
25 board, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be worshipping.

1 Thank you, Anna, for standing up today. That was
2 huge. That took courage.

3 But we are supposed to be working. By the time we
4 leave here we should be tired.

5 We really should be tired. We should energized,
6 exhausted, but energized. That's what worship is.

7 When we practice the presence of Christ, when we
8 are aware of his presence in our midst, it will lead us to
9 genuine worship, enthusiastic worship.

10 And many of you say, "I could really get into that,
11 Wenda, if I could just see Christ. It would be easy to
12 practice the presence of Christ if I could see him."

13 People think that. In fact, Pastor Mark and I are
14 doing some interviews with our tenth graders now, helping
15 them to find a discipleship verse so that when they
16 celebrate their discipleship here in the fall they will have
17 a verse that goes with their faith.

18 And we have an opportunity to ask them, "Do you
19 have any questions for us? Do you want to ask any
20 questions?"

21 A lot of the kids go, "No, not really."

22 I always say, "If you have a question, call me to
23 talk together about it. I like to talk about God and what
24 he's doing in your life. I love that."

25 This one young woman, Hillary actually, she said,

1 "Yes, I have a question. How come Christ isn't seen today?
2 I'm kind of jealous of Moses. Why did he get to see the
3 face of God? I know his hairstyle changed and everything,
4 but I wouldn't even mind that. I'm kind of jealous of
5 Moses. And what about those first disciples? It doesn't
6 seem fair that they got to be in the presence of Christ and
7 we have to kind of pretend that he's here."

8 What if Christ was present here in bodily form? He
9 would look like one of our visitors.

10 We have visitors that come, so we would actually
11 see him.

12 We would know that he was here. Can you go with me
13 on this a minute?

14 What if he was actually here in bodily form? How
15 would we adjust our worship?

16 Maestro, where are? There you are? Would you
17 practice more?

18 I got to thinking about this myself. How would I
19 adjust my message?

20 I am not even sure of my knees. I don't think they
21 would support me.

22 I'm not sure if I could get up if I saw Christ
23 sitting right here in bodily form.

24 Think about this. How might it change what we put
25 in the plate?

1 Imagine when we read the Scripture. What if we
2 read that story about the transfiguration with Jesus sitting
3 right here?

4 Wouldn't we look at Jesus and think I wonder what
5 he thinks of that story about him?

6 Do you see what I mean? Do you get the idea? How
7 might his bodily presence transform what we do in this
8 place?

9 I shudder with excitement to think what it would be
10 like to serve him a cup of coffee. How about you coffee
11 ministers?

12 Wouldn't it just change the way we think about
13 taking the garbage out if the King was on campus today? It
14 was the least I could do, right?

15 There is only one problem with this. The other
16 churches, you know what I'm saying, in our community.

17 If they got wind of the fact that Jesus was at
18 Bethany and not there at their churches we wouldn't be very
19 popular.

20 It would be like wait a minute. How come Bethany?
21 Why is he there and not in our church?

22 And that would be a problem and I think that deep
23 down each and every one of us know that Jesus really didn't
24 want it that way.

25 He didn't want to just come to Bethany. He didn't

1 want to come to one church.

2 That's why he said to his disciples before he died,
3 he said, "I will not leave you alone." John 14.

4 "In a little while the world will no longer see me,
5 but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also."
6 John 14.

7 John 20, after the resurrection the disciples are
8 all huddled together in that room, they're all afraid
9 because they are thinking what happened to Jesus is probably
10 going to happen to us now. So they are so afraid.

11 He comes through shut doors of fear, as he always
12 does, and says peace, and then he breathes on them.

13 He breathes on us and he says receive the Holy
14 Spirit. Receive my spirit.

15 The spirit of Jesus Christ himself, Disciples.
16 That's the Holy Spirit.

17 And if the spirit of Christ graces our churches
18 with his presence, that's the promise, then can we take that
19 lightly?

20 Can we really sing half-heartedly, really, if
21 that's the truth?

22 Can we mumble those prayers and "He is the one that
23 has given peace and joy, he is the one," can we really sing
24 like that.

25 I am challenging you. I am challenging you for

1 these next fifty days, I am challenging you to trust in the
2 reality that Christ is present in this church.

3 He's present here. He's with us. He's here this
4 morning.

5 I am challenging you to fix your minds and your
6 hearts on the reality that Jesus Christ is present in this
7 church and when you worship.

8 And when we look at that great text today from
9 Matthew 17, we learn so much from Peter.

10 I love Peter. I really relate to Peter. Go ahead
11 and look at it with me for a second.

12 We will just look at a couple of verses. Matthew
13 17, Verses 1 to 8.

14 We learn a lot from Peter. We learn how to respond
15 to the presence of the risen Christ from Peter in this story
16 and it is awesome.

17 He teaches us what a huge difference Christ makes
18 in his mind. It's such a great story.

19 He takes Peter, James and John. I don't know why
20 he chose those three, but those were the three. That's
21 Verse 1.

22 They are up on that mountain. Wouldn't that be
23 awesome, to go on that Easter road with Jesus up the
24 mountain?

25 They are up on the mountain. Jesus wastes no time.

1 Verse 2, he's transfigured.

2 They don't even have a chance to sit down. They
3 just barely get up there.

4 This is so like Jesus. He is always surprising us,
5 always surprising us with his presence and his glory and his
6 majesty and his beauty, if we would look.

7 But suddenly he's transfigured. In other words,
8 the word is metamorphosis.

9 You know what it's like to be morphed. It's one of
10 the most painful things we endure, isn't it?

11 Who likes to be morphed? I don't. Unless it means
12 I might grow closer to Christ. It hurts.

13 But Jesus is morphed in front of them. In other
14 words, they had seen the human form of Jesus, they had known
15 the Christ, but now the divine God, the divinity, the divine
16 light of God was now showing forth in the bodily form, so
17 they get a glimpse of God in Jesus.

18 And look at Verse 4. Peter says to Jesus, what
19 does he say?

20 It's good. Do you think he mumbled that? No. I
21 think it was more like, "Lord, it's good. It's so good to
22 be here."

23 And then Peter goes, he can never control himself,
24 he just goes nuts next, because he wants to build these
25 three booths, okay, hey, hey, let's build a booth for Elijah

1 and Moses.

2 And then that's when I think that God's voice came
3 through and said, "Now, Peter, don't dilute the authority.
4 Remember Jesus. Keep your focus on Jesus. Listen to him."

5 That's when they got afraid again, but then there
6 is Jesus again reaching down and touching.

7 That's why we hold hands so much here at Bethany,
8 so we can remember that Jesus always touches us and brings
9 us back from our fear to a new place again.

10 I just love this story and I love Peter's response,
11 isn't this good? This is so good.

12 Have you ever been to a worship experience where
13 you just didn't want to leave?

14 I saw some of you during Holy Week kind of linger a
15 bit.

16 I've sat with some of my sisters in Christ at the
17 cross after everyone else was gone.

18 You just don't want to go back out there. You want
19 to stay because it feels so good.

20 Have you ever been in prayer with somebody where
21 you just didn't want to wreck the moment by even saying
22 amen.

23 After the amen you continue to hold. It happens to
24 me every Friday.

25 This story comes to mind every Friday when my

1 prayer advocate prays, stands in the abyss for me and the
2 ministry here.

3 I don't want to leave. I do not want to break that
4 moment.

5 I really get what Peter means. Lord, could I just
6 lock the door from the inside?

7 I don't know if I want to go back out there into
8 that heartache, into that darkness. But he promises us that
9 it's going to be okay.

10 When we practice the presence of the risen Christ
11 in our midst it gives us over to genuine worship.

12 It's only natural that we would do that and one of
13 the ways that the church is fond to do that is to sing.

14 How about these guys? They've got the books and
15 they are still joyous. I love that picture.

16 But one of the ways that we worship is through
17 music and singing and you don't have to be expert at it.

18 These guys, Maestro, can you get your group up
19 there.

20 Show that next picture, Cindy. This is how we
21 ought to approach worship. Seriously.

22 (Laughter)

23 You know, the next time you are cleaning, and you
24 go nuts, you are singing in the shower, transfer that, bring
25 it on in here.

1 Bring it in here because that's what we are
2 supposed to do.

3 We are supposed to be breaking out in song. That's
4 the picture I want you to leave with today, because we have
5 so much to sing about.

6 Now, these guys, this worship team up here, I have
7 to get this straight with you guys, they are not here to do
8 your work.

9 Get your deodorant on when you come to church,
10 okay, and go to work.

11 They are here to lead you in the work; they are not
12 here to do your work for you, to do your praising.

13 So thank you for helping us do the work. I really
14 appreciate it, and I know you do, and you clap and praise
15 God for them at times and that's appropriate, too.

16 In fact, maybe we ought to do it more. Maybe we
17 ought to do it more, because it takes a lot to get up there.

18 Maybe we ought to praise God more for their gifts
19 and their willingness to lead us in the work of worship.

20 If we practice the presence of the risen Christ it
21 will give us over to genuine worship.

22 Here is my idea, let's practice. Stand up. I love
23 you guys. Let's stand up.

24 They are going to lead us in a little verse so when
25 we do it in a couple of minutes it going to sound really

1 good.

2

3 "We are going to celebrate, celebrate,

4 Celebrate Jesus.

5 Come on and celebrate

6 Make a joyful noise

7 Celebrate Jesus

8 Can't hold back, got to let it out,

9 Come on all God's people shout to the Lord

10 Lift up your hears and celebrate."

11

12 That was great. That was really well done. Today

13 we are starting on a wonderful adventure.

14 It is a spiritual adventure, and like any other

15 adventure you ever take in your life there is going to be

16 some unknown surprises.

17 I and Pastor Mark, we're praying that you might be

18 delighted and surprised during this fifty day spiritual

19 adventure.

20 Because we have such an exciting life together in

21 Christ Jesus we don't have to stay in that dark tomb where

22 it's musty and smelly.

23 We can go out on the road where he is before us to

24 do that.

25 And when we think about what Jesus has done for us,

1 worship is a natural response.

2 It's just natural that we would stand and kind of
3 flail about like those people are doing.

4 You can even shut the lights down. Brad, let's try
5 it on this next song, let's just go dark.

6 Go dark and let's try it, because you know what?
7 Jesus is here.

8 He's here this morning. He's in our midst. He's
9 here.

10 And so let's shout. Let's not hold back. All
11 lights off, Brad. Let's go with it.

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